

"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

# The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

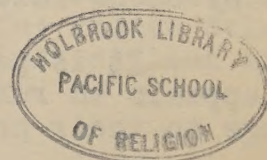
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## THE FIELD IS THE WORLD

By William G. Mather\*



Nearly two thousand years ago there was a young carpenter in an agricultural village known as Nazareth. Born of parents of deep religious character, he showed a similar concern for religion. A student of the scriptures, he was a leader in the affairs of the local synagogue. He often took the scroll and read the lesson on the Sabbath day, and he served as teacher. He came under the influence of a cousin by the name of John, leader of a sect within Judaism which sought to purify religion and turn it to the teachings of the ancient prophets. He allied himself with this sect led by John and was baptized in the Jordan river. His baptism stirred him deeply. He felt a very special relationship with God, as the Almighty recognized him as His son.

He taught with many figures of speech as he referred to the people of the farms and villages of Galilee and Samaria. In his talks he spoke of the field and the seed; and the way the fruit of the seed depends on the fertility of the field. He spoke of wheat and weeds growing together to illustrate the way in which people of good and evil hearts may live side by side. He asked his hearers to look at the lillies of the field and see how easily and simply they took life and gave to life in their beauty. When he wished to illustrate the impartial and even handed love of God for people of all kinds of heart and life, he spoke of the rain which fell alike upon the just and the unjust. He spoke of lost sheep and the way in which the shepherd would seek to find them. He spoke too of the way wolves would clothe themselves to look like sheep. He spoke of the relationship between the vine and the branches which bore the fruit, as an allegory of the relationship between himself and his disciples. He spoke of the sons of the farmer who refused to work in the field, and approved the behavior of the one who, although he first refused to work, nevertheless did so.

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The last meal he took with his disciples, in that famous upper room evolved into an agricultural drama. He took bread from the table, and broke it. It had come originally from the kernel of wheat which had been cast into the ground and there had died in order that more kernels might come; more kernels to go through the grinding of the mill and the heat of the oven in order to nourish man. This bread he said, was his body, broken for mankind. He took also of the cup of wine, wine which had come from the grapes, full in their juice and ripeness on the vine, and had gone through the crush of the winepress and the fermentation of the wine vat in order that that which they had to give to man might be put at his service. "This," he said to them, "is my blood which is shed for you."

It is perhaps because of this rural nature of the Master that he appeals to rural people the world around. He speaks in their language to their problems.

With a group of ordinary people from the sea, the farms, and the villages at his heels, he went through the by-ways of Palestine, teaching as was the custom in that day.

He was alert to the physical condition of his hearers. When he saw those who were sick, he did what he could in the way which he had at hand to heal them. When he saw people hungry, he did what he could with what he had at hand to feed them. If you will read closely the things he said, you will discover that it dealt almost exclusively with the way in which a person should live with his family, with his immediate village neighbor, with his friends, with his enemies, and in fact with all peoples of the world. So far as Jesus was concerned, the way a man felt toward God was shown in the way that he acted toward his fellowman. Said he, "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. By their fruits ye shall know them." It may be for this reason that the early Christians were known as followers of "the way."

One such was in the vision of the "kingdom." To the orthodox Jew the Kingdom was to be a real political kingdom, established upon the earth as a theocratic government. The seat of the government would be Jerusalem. The nations of the world would be ruled from this world capital. But Jesus taught that the kingdom was a thing of the inner mind and heart. It came little by little, as a man learned more of the love of God and the requirements which God laid upon man in his relationship with his fellows. The kingdom was to grow slowly among men as a grain of mustard seed grows. There was to be no subversive scheme, no revolutionary plot, no political overturn. Jesus' Gospel was to be shared with all men. There was to be no ruling hierarchy or ministers of state. On the contrary "He that would be greatest among you, shall be the servant of all."

Matthew records in the last chapter of his gospel that as Jesus was taking his leave from the disciples on a mountain in Galilee he said to them, "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Perhaps as



The disciples later came down the mountainside alone, talking among themselves about the commission which had been given unto them, "all nations" repeating itself over and over in their ears, they may have recalled a happier time when he told them and the group that had gathered around them a parable of a man who sowed good seed in a field and discovered later that an enemy had come by night and sowed bad seed there also. But the farmer preferred to let the good and the evil seed grow together. Later, apart from the crowds, his disciples came to him and asked for an explanation of this parable of the wheat and the weeds of the field. The Master replied to them, "He that sows the good seed is the son of man; the field is the world."

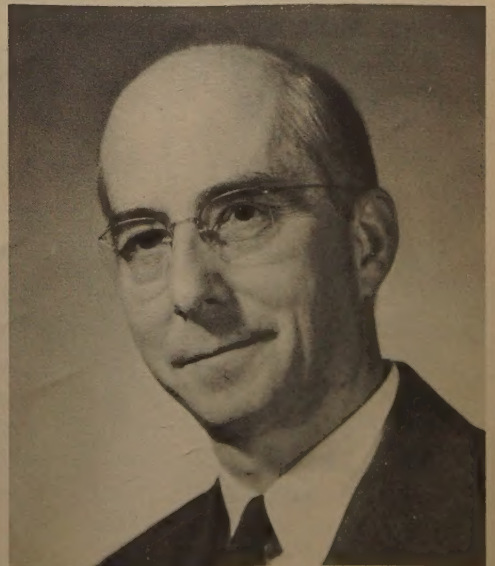
### THE FIELD IS THE WORLD

Yes, the field is the world. Nothing smaller will do for the gospel of Jesus. And nothing smaller will do for the task of the rural church. The field is the world. It was on that day, and on that occasion, that the Christian missionary enterprise was born.

Because the field was the world, Paul launched out among the nations of the gentile world on the first great series of foreign mission endeavors. It is because the field is the world that we who are gathered here this evening are Christians at all; because the word has been brought to us also from that little group on that mountainside in Galilee. Because the field is the world, Adoniram Judson launched the American Baptist Foreign Missionary enterprise when he set sail for Burma. Because the field is the world, there is no rural church, no matter how small, that can be content to work only in the neighborhood that immediately surrounds it.

These early missionaries carried with them a book, which they read to themselves when they sat on the verandas of their houses, and from which they read to the people when they preached. The book contained the words of life. The people were hungry for the words of life, and eager to read them for themselves. Thus the early missionaries began the translation of the scriptures into the native language of the country where they were, and began to teach the people who could not read, how to read in their own tongue the words of life. Thus schools were established.

The missionaries carried with them medicines in order that they might keep well, far from the reach of their family physicians. The medicines which the missionary carried, and which he used to keep himself well, he shared with the many, many sick who would crowd around him as he made his rounds through the native villages. But his knowledge of medicine was small, and the ills of the people were great; so it was not long before the medical missionary became a standard attachment in each mission station.





As Jesus had taught, the missionaries taught. As Jesus had ministered to the sick, the missionaries ministered to the sick.

Thus it was that William Carey who went from England to India was impressed with the need for better food for the people. In 1820 he founded the Agri-Horticultural Society for India when there were but two other agricultural societies in all the world - one in Italy and one in Scotland. Interestingly enough, this India society was the fore-runner of the well known Royal Agricultural Society of England which was formed eighteen years later.

Wrote this William Carey, "In India, one of the finest countries of the world, the state of agriculture and horticulture is abject and the people's food poor, and their comforts meager. India has so much to learn about the draining of marshes, the banking of river courses, the irrigation of large areas, the rotation of crops, the betterment of tools, the breeding of stock, the culture of new vegetables and herbs, the planting of orchards and the budding, grafting and pruning of fruit trees. The recent introduction of the potato and the strawberry suggest what might be done."

These ideas from a man who had been sent to India to "preach the gospel," seemed strange to some. In fact, a sum of money had been raised in America for Serampore College where Carey taught, and he was informed that the money was being withheld until the trustees of the fund, "were assured that the money was not to be spent on the teaching of science in the college, but only on the theological education of the Hindu converts." This annoyed Carey no end. "I must confess," he replied, "I never heard anything more illiberal."

That was in 1820, and yet even today we find some objections by those who have forgotten the Master's own teachings and examples. In spite of that however, there is hardly a mission station around the globe today that does not enter to some extent at least, the field of agricultural missions both as an expression of Christian obligation and concern. And yet the Second World Food Survey, the preliminary report of which was published in 1952, indicates a wide disparity in the diets of people around the world. They go to bed hungry, not because they are lazy, but because of exploitation and lack of means to use the benefits of modern breeding of plants and animals. They do not have the proper tools to work difficult ground. They often farm too small patches of ground, for which they pay exorbitant share rents from landed proprietors whose faces are rarely seen except at harvest time. In some countries, the rate of tenancy is better than seventy-five per cent, and the rents range as high as 80% of the crop.

To assist such people is not easy. It is not charity they want. They have pride in their ancient methods of agriculture, poor and inadequate as such methods may be, because they are theirs and they are proud of their ways and of their native land, as we are proud of ours. Charity often is an insult to them. To such people









the Communist comes and says, "If you will join us and fight with us you as a people will govern your own land. You will have sufficient soil of your own to cultivate, that you have good strains of plants and animals; that you have a good education." The Communist comes speaking their language, dressed in their clothes, living by their ways. He comes as an understanding friend. Of course in the long run he does not make good his promises, but for the short run the promises look good. It is small wonder that many hear his words and follow him. The morning paper, Milwaukee Sentinel, reports accurately that in India and China the majority of the people hate the French more than they hate communism; and that although receptive to American economic and medical aid, it's "too late to make up for French Colonial oversights that treated the Vietnamese as a second-class citizen in his own land."

### THE AGRICULTURAL MISSIONARY

The Christian missionary is often limited but he makes good his promises. Mission schools are few, and missionaries, though they number in thousands, are few. And the mission enterprises, although millions of dollars are involved, are still but weak in the world compared to the billions of dollars governments are prepared to spend. The missionary has made his mark in the hearts of the people, as a trusted friend.

The people in hungry areas of the world see the free spending tourist, who dresses, eats and drinks in a style fit for their king; and who laughs at the customs of the man whose country he passes through. These people see the foreign companies that build factories and drill oil wells and drive tin mines, and establish great plantations, and take the profit from the labor of the people away from their native shores.

The hungry people see the soldier; well fed, well clothed, marvelously armed, the soldier who kills anyone he is ordered to kill, and usually, as the native sees him, in defense of the land owners of his country, or in defense of a puppet government that dances at the bidding of a foreign power. There are so many tourists, business men and soldiers in comparison to missionaries that these others come to stand for America and the West in the minds of the hungry majority people of the world.

### WHICH BASIN IS OURS?

We must give far much more than we have to the missionary enterprise. We must send more medical missionaries, far more agricultural missionaries. Christian accomplishment must surpass communist promise. The field of the world is ripe for harvest, and both of the two great growing forces in the world today are locked in a struggle to harvest it -- Secularism and Christianity. We, here, must decide to which of these two we shall give our energy and our money and our prayers. The field is indeed the world; but whose field shall it be? (Rural Missions



Summer 1949) has put our choice dramatically in this single sentence: "Two basins of water are now a part of Christian history; the one was used by Pilate as he washed his hands of social responsibility--the other was used by Jesus as he washed his disciples' feet."

It is for us to live in a world of great political tension and physical need. This is no time for a counter-barrage of propaganda. We can never put only our best foot forward again in this world, while the shabby foot is hidden behind. As the Scripture has it, "There is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed." It is a time for honesty with ourselves as Christians.

For this field which is the World, this little clearing in the vastness of Space, is an open clearing which grows smaller all the time, bringing us and our neighbors closer and closer together. If there is anything in the Gospel of Jesus which we would share with them as of old the Master shared it with his neighbors, we must share it now.

The field is the world - which basin shall we take?